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SUBJECT: LESOTHO: LOCAL TELEVISION STATION GIVES HEADLINE COVERAGE
TO JUNE 4 EVENT

REF: A. STATE 55334 B. MASERU 180

Lesotho Television (LTV) covers Ambassador's discussion

¶1. LTV attended Ambassador Nolan's June 4 event (ref B). During their Friday, June 5 coverage, they re-broadcast a section of Obama's speech beginning with: "America is not [...] at war with Islam," and ending with: "The victims were innocent [...] who had done nothing to harm anybody."

¶2. LTV had been requested not to video the actual discussion, but requested interviews with two of the audience members: Professor Tefetso Mothibe, Head of the History Department at the National University of Lesotho (and the University's former vice chancellor); and Mr. Ashraf Abubaker, a prominent local businessman.

Prominent local professor happy with America's "first steps"

¶3. In his interview, Professor Mothibe stated in Sesotho, the national language, that: "America used to believe in its power, that it could stand on its own. For example, in the Iraq issue, we were made to believe that Saddam is this bad guy who's out to destroy the world (or has a vendetta against the whole world). However, we soon realized that was not the actual issue." Two positive steps he recognized from America are 1) "President Obama believes that we must be able to sit down at worldwide platforms like the United Nations and come to unilateral decisions. 2) America has elected a black President. Despite the fact that America is known as the 'land of opportunity', nobody really thought it would happen."

Businessman thinks Israel / Palestine issue key to peace

¶4. Mr. Abubaker, in his interview, stated that: "The main source of the conflict is the Israel / Palestine issue. It's the fundamental problem. If Obama can intervene and correct that situation between the Arabs and the Israelis, I believe and trust that the world could live in peace; it would be the start of the resolution of all these problems."

Comment

¶5. Lesotho papers are weekly, and normally are circulated on Thursdays. This is the only local media coverage thus far, but we will keep the Department posted. Reactions from individuals have been overwhelmingly positive. The day after the speech, the Public Diplomacy, Economic, and Political officer was told that "Obama speaks better than any other politician I have ever heard," and "This type of discussion (referring to the event held at the Ambassador's residence) is way overdue." The implication was that even if this is a small and non-extremist Muslim community, other people pass through Lesotho all the time, and the opinions of the local community can have an effect on, and be affected by, those visitors.

